

## The Economy in Perspective

*A day in the life...*

"You've changed."

"Pardon me?"

"You've changed," she said. "You're not the economy I married."

I put down the newspaper and looked at my wife, puzzled. "I have not changed. How have I changed?"

"When I married you 10 years ago," she said, "you had some spring in your step. You were ready to conquer the world. I looked at you and saw a wunderkind. Now what do I see?"

"Okay," I said. "I give up. What do you see?"

"I see," she said, "An economy falling way short of his potential."

"That's not true," I protested. "You are so exaggerating. I've just been having a few rough months at the office."

"Months?" she snorted. "You haven't been yourself for three *years*, not since March 2001! Ever since then you've been so sluggish. You used to be so ambitious and now you're slacking off. You don't work nearly as much as you used to."

"Now just a minute, dear. That is *really* unfair. Sure, I've cut back on time at the office, but I'm more productive than ever. I finally figured out how to use all of that new equipment we bought a few years ago, and I've been cranking out those widgets like nobody's business! Profitability is way up and my stock markets are going north again."

"Yes, that's true," she allowed, softening a little, "but I still say you've changed. I thought that after the last setback you'd rebound and be yourself again. But you've become so strange. For example, you've neglected all of your old bowling buddies from work. Now you just want to hang out with the finance guys who are into curling."

"My friendships from the old days have been slipping away for a long time," I said defensively.

"And it's not all my fault. Some of them have retired and some have left the country. The new guys at work have different interests. I'm just trying to adapt, you know. Got to stay flexible."

"Look," she said, her voice rising again. "You can rationalize all you want, but something is just not right with you. I mean, I can't tell what you're going to do next."

"I thought you *liked* that about me—that's what you said when we were *dating*," I smirked. "I told you when we met that I had a history of changing jobs, moving around from place to place, kind of reinventing myself. You said you *wanted* a life of adventure."

"Well that was *then*, and this is *now*," she said, drawing out the last syllable. "I'm worried about the future. Why don't you save more, like all of the *other* economies do? You keep spending and spending on all of those houses and cars and flat-panel HDTV sets and satellite dishes, and one day your world will collapse, do you know that?"

"Speaking of my world," I said, puffing out my chest, "You don't need to worry your little head about that. After all, I'm the richest economy the world has ever seen!"

"Well, let me tell *you* something, Mr. 'Richest Economy The World Has Ever Seen.' You are also the Biggest Debtor The World Has Ever Seen and you don't show any sign of letting up. Unsustainable things have a nasty habit of ending, and sometimes ending badly. You'd better shape up before it's too late."

I've had just about enough of this, I thought to myself. What self-respecting economy takes this kind of guff? "*Humph*," I snorted. I picked up the newspaper, buried my head in it, and rattled it around. "Oh, *yeah? Humph!*"

"And don't forget, Mr. Ritchie Rich—tomorrow morning is garbage pickup."

"Yes, dear."